



How Relationship and Intimacy Issues Impact The Wounded Ill and Injured

Re-integration is more than just coming home; it often includes emotional and behavioral adjustments as well. Many veterans may experience difficulty returning after being in a combat environment and may have difficulty readjusting to life at home, at work and within the community. Physical injuries often can complicate emotional and behavioral responses. These psychological changes may adversely impact family relationships, thus leading to further negative behaviors.

Injuries, to include amputations, burns, traumatic brain injury, and post traumatic stress, can challenge the emotional and sexual relationships of service members and their families. Reestablishing closeness and intimacy after an injury can be compounded by physical disability, pain, distress, and stress-related disorders. Injuries that may affect a person's ability to be sexually intimate can negatively impact their self-image and result in the member questioning their identity. Overcoming this challenge requires education, effort and understanding.

For those who have been wounded, ill, and/or injured, the resulting limited capacity to resume an established relationship that provides closeness and sexual togetherness may undermine the individual's health, relationship capacity, and even the health of the couple and family. The member may find it hard to share themselves intimately and physically and may worry about the adverse reactions it could have on their partner. Also, medications used to treat various illnesses and injuries may decrease sexual desire or affect sexual functioning.

Communication and compassion usually helps couples reintegrate as they work to restore and enhance intimacy in their relationship. This may help them rebuild the relationship to be as close, if not closer, than they were prior to the injury or illness.

Tips to Improve Intimacy

- Communicate your thoughts and feelings to include needs and desire
- Schedule time to be together to build your relationship
- Find ways to feel close, non-sexual as well as sexual ones
- Obtain medical treatment for physiological/psychological conditions
- Consult your doctor if medication treatment may contribute to your intimacy problems

Resources

- Department of Veteran Affairs: www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/ptsd-and-relationships.asp
- Defense Centers of Excellence: <http://www.dcoe.health.mil/>
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress: <http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/>